

Catholic Philosophy Engages Secular Culture in Education

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Catholic philosophy and secular culture intersect in media, professional conferences, and public and private educational institutions. A classroom is a privileged place of dialogue over an extended time (semester or year). In considering how Catholic philosophy can engage secular culture in the classroom, I am addressing philosophers of education, teachers at every level of Catholic education, and professors for ongoing education of teachers.¹

My methodology will draw upon three different types of sources which articulate goals for Catholic education: 1) writings by selected Catholic philosophers who identify challenges and principles of Catholic education, namely Msgr. Luigi Giussani, Bernard Lonergan, and Jacques Maritain; 2) documents issued by the Congregation for Catholic Education [CCE] which articulate principles for Catholic schools and Catholic teachers; and 3) mission statements of selected schools and universities which espouse Catholic character.

To begin, let us describe a key word in our argument, or 'secular' and its derivatives 'secularism' and 'secularistic.' The term 'secular' simply implies a focus on the temporal world in contrast to eternal life. When this focus becomes exclusively systematic, it moves into an ideology of 'secularism' and directly rejects eternal values. For example, the secular humanist signers of the *Humanist Manifesto of 1933*: "affirm the universe as self-existing and not created,

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented as a lecture entitled "Catholic Philosophy in Dialogue with Secular Culture" in the Christian Culture Series, St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, Nova Scotia, October 7, 2002. I am grateful for suggestions for revision from the faculty, tutors, and students at St. Francis Xavier University, St. John Vianney Theological Seminary, and Sr. Rita Rae Schneider, RSM, PhD, Sister Mary Judith O'Brien, RSM, JCD, and Sister Mary Pierre Jean Wilson, RSM, JCD.

... [reject] as unacceptable any supernatural or cosmic guarantees of human values, ... and [pronounce] the time has passed for theism..."² John Paul II laments the spreading of this ideology: "How can one not notice the ever-growing existence of *religious indifference* and *atheism* in its more varied forms, particular in its perhaps most widespread form of *secularism*?"³ Secularism forms the setting for my discussion of Christian philosophy in education because we educators are often unaware of how it permeates our thinking and ways of acting.

The second term connected with 'secular' in the title of this article is the word 'culture.' We are considering how Catholic philosophy engages with secular culture in the classroom. In the 1960's the Second Vatican Council Document *Gaudium et spes* identified education as one of the urgent problems of the relation between the Church and the modern world, placing it in the context of a broader notion of culture. Further, the document specified that "the word 'culture' in the general sense refers to all those things which go to the refining and developing of man's diverse mental and physical endowments."⁴ Recently, in *Culture and the Thomist Tradition After Vatican II*, Tracey Rowland offers an in-depth analysis of many different meanings that the term

² Corliss Lamont, *The Philosophy of Humanism* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1982), Appendix, pp. 285-289.

³ John Paul II, *Cristifidelis laici: Post-synodal Document* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1988), #4.

⁴ *Gaudium et spes* (*The Church in the Modern World*. In A. Flannery, O.P. ed. *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and post conciliar documents*. Vol 1 (New York: Costello Publishing Company, 1975), # 53. See also, M.A. Krapiec, "General Meaning of the term 'culture'" in *I-Man: An Outline of Philosophical Anthropology* (New Britain, Ct: Mariel Publications, 1983), pp. 170-172.

'culture' has in contemporary Catholic intellectual thought.⁵ My use of secular culture in this document corresponds to aspects of her use of mass culture.⁶ My goal is to offer some specific ways that Catholic teachers can directly engage with this kind of culture to elevate it and bring it into greater consistency with the proper purpose of education.

A third term used in this article also needs to be introduced, namely, 'transcendental'. Traditional Thomistic metaphysics identifies four transcendentals, i.e., characteristics whose perfection is found in God and in which everything that exists participates more or less imperfectly. These transcendentals are unity, beauty, truth, and goodness, because God is One, Beautiful, True, and Good. Bernard Lonergan in *Method in Theology* states: "[T]he transcendentals are comprehensive in connotation, unrestricted in denotation, invariant over cultural change."⁷ They therefore have a crucial place in all kinds of educational contexts. Jacques Maritain captures one important value of the transcendentals in lectures he gave at Yale University on education: "A person possesses absolute dignity because he is in direct relationship with the realm of being, truth, goodness, and beauty, and with God, and it is only with these that

⁵ Tracey Rowland, *Culture and the Thomist Tradition: After Vatican II* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).

⁶ Rowland's concluding words are: "Either the Church as the Universal Sacrament of Salvation is the primary source, guardian and perfecter of culture within persons, institutions and entire societies, or culture becomes an end in itself — an ersatz religion — as in the Aristocratic Liberal and Nietzschean traditions, which in turn implodes into that anti-culture known as 'mass culture'." *Ibid.*, p. 168.

⁷ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), p. 11.

he can arrive at his complete fulfilment.”⁸ If an end of Catholic education is to help a person fulfil himself or herself, and if the transcendentals are necessary means for arriving at this end, then it follows that the transcendentals should be useful to teachers at all levels and cultural contexts or education.

The word ‘transcendental’ has also been used in Kantian critical metaphysics in association with a second term, such as ‘transcendental philosophy.’⁹ For Kant, transcendental refers to an underlying foundation necessary for something else to be the case. P.F. Strawson further developed this meaning in analytic descriptive metaphysics when he stated: “It is only because the solution is possible that the problem exists. So with all transcendental arguments.”¹⁰ Strawson appealed to transcendental arguments to demonstrate that certain philosophers (Descartes and Hume, for example) were incoherent because their argument depended upon an underlying foundation which was annulled by its own premises.

Many teachers may be surprised to discover that their actions at times similarly undermine their own educational goals. With an obscure teaching methodology driven by secularistic values, a teacher can ‘transcendentally annul’ the very goal he or she has set for students. James Swindal observes: “Persons are always embedded in social practices that themselves emerge from background certainties that can be illuminated by transcendental

⁸ Jacques Maritain, *Education at the Crossroads: Yale University Terry Lectures of 1943* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1943), p. 8.

⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1977), P. 23 #279.

¹⁰ P. F. Strawson, *An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics* (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1959), p. 40.

arguments.”¹¹

In educational circles sometimes a distinction is made between a conceptual study and a plan of action in teaching. Transcendental arguments, however, can not be separated in this way because their purpose is to demonstrate how actions (means) undermine concepts (transcendental ends), and how certain concepts (the transcendentals) underlie particular acts (teaching methodology in a classroom). In addition to seeing how secular means may undermine transcendental goals of Catholic education, I will also suggest some acts which can be introduced in the classroom to help attain ends of Catholic education. Thus, after initially adverting to some ineffective pedagogies as transcendental annulments, I will then draw upon Catholic philosophy for transcendental remedies.

The attention of philosophers to the principles (both ends and means) for good education has a long history. Thomas Aquinas stated in the *Summa Theologica* that a teacher is offered “gratuitous grace” to assist a student led to God, but the teacher must 1) know of Divine things “so as to be capable of teaching others,” 2) be able to prove what is said “otherwise his words would have no weight,” and 3) be capable of “fittingly presenting to his hearers what he knows.”¹²

Gaudium et spes stated that it is the duty of each person “to safeguard the notion of the human person as a totality in which predominate values of intellect, will, conscience, and brotherhood, since these values were established by the Creator and wondrously restored and

¹¹ James Swindal, “Pragmatism and a ‘Catholic’ Philosophical Anthropology,” *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice*, 6 (September 2002): 71-95, here 88.

¹² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (5 vols.) (Westminster, Md: Christian Classics, 1946), Pt. I-II, q. 111, art. 4.

elevated by Christ.”¹³ One goal of a Catholic educator is to help a student towards personal fulfillment.¹⁴ Another goal is to foster in the class of students an attitude towards the common good that enables the fullest possible fulfilment of each member in the class and of the class as a whole.

In 1994 while answering a reporter’s question: “What is the ‘New Evangelization’?”, the Pope stated that: “The call for a great relaunching of *evangelization* enters again and again into the present life of the Church in a number of ways. In truth, it has never been absent.”¹⁵ This new evangelization must be taken *ad gentes*, to the people, of every culture and every age. It is an “*encounter of the Gospel with the culture of each epoch*.”¹⁶ In it members of the Church go “*out to meet new generations*” and engage directly with “*a powerful anti-evangelization*” in a struggle for the souls of the young people in the contemporary world.¹⁷ At the beginning of the third millennium the classroom is a wonderful location for teachers to begin again a new evangelization of Catholic education.¹⁸

Bernard Lonergan recognized in his Cincinnati Lectures on Education that a Catholic philosophy of education “aims at the human good in this life, not apart from evil, but in tension

¹³ *Gaudium et spes*, #61.

¹⁴ See M. D’Souza, C.S.B., “Jacques Maritain’s Seven Misconceptions of Education: Implications for the preparation of Catholic school teachers,” *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice* 5.4 (June 2002): 435-453.

¹⁵ John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Knopf, 1994), p. 105.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 112-113.

¹⁸ See Congregation for Catholic Education [CCE], *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (Rome Vatican Press, 1998).

with it.”¹⁹ Acting against the four transcendentals and contributing to contemporary tensions in education are attitudes of self-centered individualism, attraction to what is fragmented and ugly, subjective lack of confidence in human reason to discover objective truth, and preferences for relative values and opinions about the good. Lonergan also argues that the good is dynamic and known analogously: “In so far as we are able to distinguish different levels of integration in the human good, we will be able to distinguish different classes of educational goals.”²⁰ Thus, if we can clarify particular goods at which the Catholic philosophy of education aims, then we can propose particular educational goals and foundational teaching methodologies to aid their achievement.

While the integration of all four transcendentals of one, beautiful, true, and good are important at each level of education, for the purposes of simplification this paper will focus on one transcendental at each level of education. At the elementary level — educate accenting unity to overcome excessive competition and selfishness. At the secondary level — educate attending to the beautiful to overcome attraction to the ugly and fragmented. At the undergraduate university and pre-theology seminary level — educate promoting objective truth to overcome the pull of pragmatism, subjectivism, scepticism, and fundamentalism. At the graduate university and theology seminary level — educate building the common good to overcome the pull of relativism, radical political ideologies, and consumerism.

¹⁹ Bernard Lonergan, *Topics in Education: The Cincinnati Lectures of 1959 on the philosophy of education at Xavier University in Cincinnati*. In R. Doran and F. Crowe, eds. *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, Vol. 10 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), p. 30.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p, 48.

Some may wonder why the relation of the transcendentals to Catholic education is so important. One answer to this question is provided by John Paul II in *Fides et ratio* where he explicitly connects the metaphysical transcendentals with a call to participate in a new evangelization:

I have unstintingly recalled the pressing need for a *new evangelization*; and I appeal now to philosophers to explore more comprehensively the dimensions of the true, the good and the beautiful to which the word of God gives access. This task becomes all the more urgent if we consider the challenges which the new millennium seeks to entail, and which affect in a particular way regions and cultures which have a long-standing Christian tradition. This attention to philosophy too should be seen as a fundamental and original contribution in service of the new evangelization.²¹

Philosophers who turn their attention to the place of metaphysics, the transcendentals, and transcendental arguments in education are participating in this new evangelization.

Elementary School and Educating towards Unity

How does a culture of secularism permeate the elementary school classroom in North America? Fragmentation and instability as expressed through overstimulation of the imagination by television and an emphasis on gratification of feelings often accompany the young child into school. The United States National Committee for Education has required the introduction of critical thinking into all areas of education for elementary school children as a counterweight to subjective secular values influencing their thoughts and actions.

In addition to secularistic influences, the normal development of children from the ages of 5 to 12 manifests a self-centered focus and competition with siblings. This normal

²¹ John Paul II, *Fides et ratio: On the Relation between Faith and Reason* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1998), # 103.

development is exacerbated when children come from broken or dysfunctional homes. Thomas Aquinas points out in *Summa Contra Gentiles* III, Q. 122, art. 8 the importance of unified parental education of practical reason in a child to integrate the 'implosion of the passions' which naturally occur.²² When this parental education does not occur at home, the elementary teacher has a significant challenge in building two kinds of unity: unity of personality within the student and a unity based on the common good among the students in the particular class.

Elementary school teachers, whether Catholic or not, are often formed by a philosophy of education developed by John Dewey, the American classical pragmatist. Dewey's text *My Pedagogic Creed* described his view of the essence of education, the school, subject-matter, and method. It shifts the ground from an enlightenment foundation of intellectual formation to a pragmatist ground of personal experience. In his words: "I believe finally, that education must be conceived as a continuing reconstruction of experience; that the process and the goal of education are one and the same thing."²³ The merging of process and goal, and situating it in the present moment is also captured in Dewey's emphasis upon image rather than on linear thinking.²⁴

Dewey was one of the signers of the famous *Humanist Manifesto of 1933* which established some of the key principles of secular humanism. The eighth principle of this

²² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 4. vols. (Garden City, New York: Image books, 1956).

²³ John Dewey, "My Pedagogic Creed," *The School Journal* 54, 3 (January 16, 1897): 77-80, here reproduced www.infed.org/archives/e-texts/e-dew-pc.htm, p. 7.

²⁴ Dewey, *Ibid.*, "I believe that the image is the great instrument of instruction. What a child gets out of any subject presented to him is simply the images which he himself forms with regard to it.", p. 8.

Manifesto bears repeating: "Humanism considers the complete realization of human personality to be the end of man's life and seeks its development and fulfillment in the here and now."²⁵

The first half of this principle would be shared by Catholic philosophers. Jacques Maritain's third rule for education states: "the whole work of education and teaching must tend to unify, not spread out; it must strive to foster the internal unity in man."²⁶ Fostering the internal unity of a child is another way of saying that the teacher is seeking to help in the realization of the personality of each unique child in his or her classroom. In a 1977 document on *The Catholic School* the Congregation for Catholic Education supported this particular goal as had Dewey and Maritain:

It must never be forgotten that the purpose of instruction is education, that is, the development of man from within, freeing him from that conditioning which would prevent him from becoming a fully integrated human being. The school must begin from the principle that its educational programme is intentionally directed to the growth of the whole person.²⁷

Thus, there is initial agreement among the secular humanist Dewey, Maritain, and the Congregation for Catholic education about the goal of fostering the internal unity of the person.

When the second half of the secular humanist principle is compared with Catholic philosophy, however, we find substantial disagreement. While principle number eight of the Humanist Manifesto states that persons should "seek it [the development and fulfilment of the

²⁵ Lamont, *Philosophy of Humanism*, p. 287.

²⁶ Maritain, *Education at the Crossroads*, p. 45.

²⁷ Congregation for Catholic Education [CCE], *The Catholic School* (Rome: Vatican Press, 1977), #27.

human personality] in the here and now;”²⁸ the Congregation for Catholic Education focuses on an eternal goal for this fulfilment. In *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* we read: “The educational value of Christian anthropology ... is where students discover the true value of the human person: loved by God, with a mission on earth and a destiny that is immortal.”²⁹ Seeking fulfilment in the here and now is radically opposed to seeking fulfilment in a destiny that is immortal. The end or goal of human life is so different in secular humanism and Catholic philosophy that it is not surprising they would lead to different ways of educating.

Lonergan observes that for Dewey knowledge is primarily “a matter of planning action and forming new hypotheses after the action has been performed. It is a continuous matter of adjustment to situations.”³⁰ In contrast to Dewey’s approach to learning, the Congregation for Catholic Education states that “[t]he educational process is not simply a human activity, it is a genuine Christian journey towards perfection.”³¹ A concrete example of how a Catholic teacher imbued with a secularistic culture can inadvertently effect a transcendental annulment may demonstrate this difference in methodology.

Some teachers reward a student with candy or other material prizes for a correct answer in a subject or for doing an act like sweeping the classroom floor. If repeated too frequently, this rewarding of a discovery of truth or for a generous act for the common good by a material good,

²⁸ Lamont, *Philosophy of Humanism*, p. 287.

²⁹ Congregation for Catholic Education [CCE], *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (Rome: Vatican Press, 1988), #76.

³⁰ Lonergan, *Topics in Education*, pp. 4-5.

³¹ CCE, *Religious Dimension of Education*, #48.

such as something pleasurable to eat, inverts values and undermines fostering the development of the human personality towards unity of structure and purpose. It suggests to the child that the real value of truth or generosity is found in experience of the pleasure of the moment following an act, (i.e., when the candy is consumed), rather than in the joy experienced by the higher activity itself, (i.e. the exercise of intellect and will towards a particular spiritual truth or good). The system of material rewards for spiritual values is a product of secular thinking (especially materialism and consumerism). Using this methodology of material reward stimulates lower level impulses and desires of the student instead of building the interior capacity for virtue through self-governance and creative activity. Rather than fostering the actualization of the unity within the human personality, the teacher transcendently impedes or annuls it.

Dewey often uses the concepts of training and efficiency in his *"My Pedagogic Creed"* while Maritain argues in *Education at the Crossroads* that "education is not animal training... [but rather] a human awakening."³² Instead of trying to control the student from outside, the teacher should help the child to grow from within, fostering a movement from potentiality to actuality. Karol Wojtyla in *The Acting Person* emphasizes that a person is fulfilled not by something that happens to him or her, like the experience of the passion of pleasure, but rather by the acts that he or she does: "To fulfill oneself means to actualize, and in a way to bring to the proper fullness, that structure in man which is characteristic for him because of his personality and also because of his being somebody and not merely something; it is the structure of self-

³² Maritain, *Education at the Crossroads*, p. 9. See also Dewey, *My Pedagogic Creed*, "To prepare him for the future life means to give him command of himself; it means so to train him that he will have the full and ready use of all his capacities; that his eye and ear and hand may be tools ready to command... that the executive forces be trained to act economically and efficiently.", p. 3.

governance and self-possession.”³³ Ultimately this fulfilment flows from the formation of virtue through the activities of self-governance, self-possession, and self-gift. As Wojtyla summarizes it: “Axiologically, his fulfillment is reached only through the good, while moral evil leads or amounts to, so to speak, nonfulfillment.”³⁴

Jean Vanier, well known for his work in establishing Christian communities for the handicapped in *Made for Happiness: Discovering the Meaning of Life with Aristotle* emphasizes: “In order to be a fully accomplished human being, a happy man ... must be master of himself, with an inner structure.”³⁵ It is virtue that develops this inner structure, and in the example we are presently considering, it is the virtue of temperance that regulates the desire for pleasure. A child enters elementary school with many desires. A teacher can help the child “to orient these desires, with all their fulminating energy, towards the sought-after end. It is a question of opening up the desiring element to the rational principle, to the *logos*, so that it may be imbued with and permeated by the intelligence.”³⁶ Vanier concludes: “It is education that orients us before we are able to take control of our own growth. It is education that determines our relationship to pleasure.”³⁷ It is education that helps a young person develop virtues and a good and wholesome character.

³³ Karol Wojtyla, *The Acting Person* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1979), p. 151.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 153.

³⁵ Jean Vanier, *Made for Happiness: Discovering the Meaning of Life with Aristotle* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2001), p. 110.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

The Congregation for Catholic Education identifies this action of the teacher as educating to freedom:

Education to freedom is a humanizing action, because it aims at the full development of personality. In fact, education itself must be seen as the acquisition, growth and possession of freedom. It is a matter of educating each student to free him/herself from the conditionings that prevent him/her from fully living as a person, to form him/herself into a strong and responsible personality, capable of making free and consistent choices.³⁸

At the beginning of this section we mentioned two kinds of unity associated with the transcendental flowing from the premise that God is One: the first is unity **within the individual student**, but the second is unity **among the students**. Staying with our particular example, not only is unity within a developing child transcendently annulled by the systematic offering of material rewards for higher goods, but also the unity within the class may be undermined by increasing rivalry and competition for attention, and by feelings of defeat and resentment.

The reason for these negative effects of systematic rewarding by material goods was noted long ago by St. Augustine in his text *On the Free Choice of the Will* when he reflected on an essential difference between material values and spiritual values such as truth, beauty, goodness, unity. When a material good, like a sandwich, is shared the material thing must be divided into parts so that each person gets less of the whole; yet when a spiritual value, like a discovery of truth or knowledge, is shared, no one gets less, but rather the spiritual good is multiplied and all increase their share. In Augustine's words:

We possess in the truth, therefore what we all may enjoy, equally and in common; in it are no defects or limitations. For truth receives all its lovers without arousing their envy.

³⁸ Congregation for Catholic Education [CCE], *Consecrated Persons and Their Mission in Schools: Reflections and Guidelines* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2002, #52).

... The food from truth and wisdom, they still remain complete for me. ... No part of truth is ever made the private property of anyone; it is entirely common to all at the same time.³⁹

Describing the Pope's philosophy in a chapter entitled "Secularization by Stealth," Paul Johnson observes that "[I]t is one of John Paul's axioms that, for human beings, the denial or absence of spirituality — that is, materialism — is not a neutral condition, but actively destructive."⁴⁰ If children in elementary school come from families who systematically reward them with material pleasures such as food or television, then the Catholic teacher has an added obligation to create a different Catholic culture that helps the young person to actualize his or her personality toward unity. The Congregation for Catholic Education argues that: "The Catholic school is in a unique position to offer, more than ever before, a most valuable and necessary service... [of] building a new world — one which is freed from a hedonistic mentality and from the efficiency syndrome of modern consumer society."⁴¹

What can a teacher do to help strengthen the inner unity of a child and the unity among the children in the class? Along with educating to freedom the teacher can educate to virtue. One elementary school teacher suggested offering to a student who keeps a desk in good order the opportunity to keep the class room in order too, by sweeping the floor, straightening the books or bulletin boards, or even washing the black board or white board. This takes an individual virtue and increases its range of effectiveness to building the common good of the class as a whole. In

³⁹ St. Augustine, *On the Free Choice of the Will* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), II, 14.

⁴⁰ Paul Johnson, *Pope John Paul II and the Catholic Restoration* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), p. 105.

⁴¹ CCE, *The Catholic School*, #91.

this case, the generous act is a reward itself whose energy is shared with the entire class. Other suggestions might include placing growth in the virtuous life as a conscious goal for the classroom, so that acts of intellectual virtue and moral virtue are seen by everyone as their own reward. Joy is a natural accompaniment of such a good.

On the transcendental level itself, there is another kind of remedial activity that a Catholic teacher can introduce to build a foundation for fuller participation in the unity fostered by God in the human journey towards perfection. It concerns preparation for celebration of the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Many families do not eat meals together in contemporary secular culture. With availability of the microwave and the pressure of multiple activities, each person in a family may eat on a different time-schedule. Albert Borgmann observes in "Technology and the Crisis of Contemporary Culture" that while in the past it was "just a short step from the culture of the word to the Word of God and from the culture of the table to the Breaking of the Bread," that "reality today is ruled by the device paradigm and therefore inhospitable to the holy."⁴² Television substitutes for a book read aloud to a child; and instant meals self-served substitute for a shared sit-down dinner with healthy food and good conversation.

An elementary teacher can transcendently activate participation in communal celebration by reading aloud and by sharing food with a whole class. In these ways the teacher transcendently prepares the students for reception of the gift of the spiritual union with God and the Church offered through the Liturgy and Sacraments.

Venerable Catherine McAuley (1888), Foundress of the Religious Sisters of Mercy, in

⁴² Albert Borgmann, "Technology and the crisis of contemporary culture," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, 70: 33-44, here 40-41.

Familiar Instructions encouraged those sisters who were engaged in elementary school teaching to have great zeal for fostering virtue and working for the full development of their human personality: “[Confidence in God for the apostolate of education] will lead us to undergo, with sweetness, all the labour and fatigue attendant on the care and instruction of children, and it will animate us with a burning zeal for their advancement in every virtue.”⁴³ The virtue of religion and participating in the life of God can be either transcendently annulled or transcendently fostered by practical initiatives of teachers.

Education for Beauty in High School

Turning now to the secondary level of education, we will consider how Christian philosophy can intersect with secular culture in relation to the transcendental, the Beautiful. If we ask what kind of beauty high school students are attracted to, many examples come to mind: athletic ability, physical beauty of models and heros, beauty of colors, lights, and sounds. Lonergan notes the attraction of the negation of value, of evil to good, and ugliness to aesthetic beauty. This negation appears among many teenagers in an equal attraction for what adults often consider as ugly: unkempt hair and clothes, use of slang, foul language, vulgar gestures, fascination with violence, antagonistic manners and attitudes towards authority figures. It is as if at the same moment the young person discovers the beautiful as a value, he or she also discovers its opposite. For example, high school students often will cruelly and directly reject another

⁴³ Rev. Mother McAuley, *Familiar Instructions* (St. Louis, Mo.: Ev. E. Careas, 1888), p. 12. See also Prudence Allen, RSM, “Venerable Catherine McAuley and the Dignity of the Human Person,” *New Blackfriars*, 83, 972 (February 2002): 52-72.

student who lacks physical beauty or who may be handicapped at the same time that they idolize an athletic hero or movie star.

Another aspect of the young teenager that is relevant to our discussion is the tendency to want to be immersed completely in a peer-group identity. Lonergan also addresses this characteristic: "One is just a drifter; he makes no choices; he does not want to be the center of intelligent, rational, free, responsible, choice. In so far as he makes a choice at all, it is a choice to be like everybody else, to be one of the crowd, to conform, to be other-directed."⁴⁴ This natural tendency of peer-group identification in the teenager is exaggerated by secular culture.

In a certain sense Dewey's *Pedagogic Creed* helped to set up the contemporary context in which education becomes almost synonymous with social consciousness even when the society is deteriorating.⁴⁵ The secular emphasis on fulfilment in the here and now suggests to the young person that life is simply a series of loosely connected episodes, without direction. The implosion of television into the homes daily reinforce this attitude through popular 'sit-coms' and soap operas aimed at an audience of young people. The reduction of knowledge to bits of information increases the impression that there is no unity or purpose to learning.

Several contemporary Catholic educators have recently written about how Catholic philosophy can engage directly in this secular phenomenon. Cardinal Francis Stafford argued in a three-part pastoral letter on Catholic Education that the transcendentals are important for fostering an organic vision of the world:

⁴⁴ Lonergan, *Topics in Education*, p. 46.

⁴⁵ Dewey, *My Pedagogic Creed*, "I believe that education is a regulation of the process of coming to share in the social consciousness; and that the adjustment of individual activity on the basis of this social consciousness is the only sure method of social reconstruction.", p. 9.

We should remember that we live in an age of information overload. We are drowning in too many data and too little coherence. The task of the Catholic school is to restore a sense of organic wholeness to knowledge; to instill a sense of wonder before the beauty, truth and goodness of created reality. We must demonstrate that the broken fragments of our world fit together in a deeper fabric of meaning. We must reassert that beauty, truth and goodness exist; that God is their source; and that in Him, as His child, the human person possesses a surpassing nobility that is more than the sum of our genes or atoms.⁴⁶

Msgr. Luigi Giussani, founder of the Communion and Liberation movement and experienced Italian high school educator, pointed similarly to the organic purpose of life by the title of his book *The Risk of Education: Discovering our Ultimate Destiny*.⁴⁷ The Jesuit philosopher Norris Clarke, S.J. pleads with his reader in *The One and the Many* to rediscover the truth that life is not simply a series of unconnected episodes. Life is a journey that is going somewhere. He concludes: "Get on with the Journey, as a fully self-conscious Traveler!"⁴⁸

How can Catholic teachers in high school help the young men and women in their classroom to become fully conscious travelers on the journey of life when secular forces are pulling them in a contrary direction? Beauty delights the intellect by an appeal to the form revealed through the senses. Form is what gives something its interior structure; and in living things, the form is what also draws the unfolding of a particular structure from potentiality to actualization. Thomas Aquinas, in *Summa Theologica*, describes three fundamental

⁴⁶ J. F. Cardinal Stafford, *In the Beginning the Word: Pastoral Letter to the People of God of Northern Colorado on Catholic Education*. 3 parts (Denver, Colorado: Archdiocesan Printing Services, 1995), II, #24.

⁴⁷ Msgr. Luigi Giussani, *The Risk of Education: Discovering our ultimate destiny* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001).

⁴⁸ W. N. Clarke, S.J., *The One and the Many: A Contemporary Thomistic Metaphysics* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), p. 308.

characteristics of beauty: integrity, proportion, and radiance.⁴⁹ Methodologies of education relating to transcendental annulments and remedial options will be suggested for each of these three dimensions of beauty.

Integrity, the first characteristic of beauty, includes the dynamism of form. The intellect apprehends the form of something. The teachers' role consists first in providing a form to the structure of the particular course being taught, and second in leading the student to apprehend the beauty of the form through the exercise of his or her mind. The former relates more to what the teacher does, and the second more to what the teacher says.

Some examples may help to develop this point. In this article if I were to simply offer disconnected thoughts about education and the transcendentals, without connecting their inner form as relating to participating in the very life of God, it would be a disservice. If a creative writing teacher in high school simply taught writing technique without developing the inner form related to the value of interpersonal communication, then the student would never understand why the disconnected techniques were important for his or her life. The inner form leads the student to discover the true beauty of the subject.

In *The Closing of the American Mind* Alan Bloom described the deadening effect of a teaching methodology that depends on fragmented textbooks or anthologies. It simply reinforces the expectation that life is a series of unconnected episodes.⁵⁰ Giussani in *The Risk of Education* "insist[s] on the central role played by the educator, which I define as the role of consistency... a

⁴⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Pt. I, q. 4, art. 4, rpl. obj. 1.

⁵⁰ Alan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987).

strong safeguard of the link...between the adolescent's shifting attitudes and the ultimate, total sense of reality."⁵¹ Giussani hints at what I call a 'transcendental annulment' when he notes the way a teacher who lacks a consistency of logical form ruins a student's desire to engage with practical daily life using a principle taught by the educator. In the transcendental annulment pedagogically introduced by the teacher's lack of consistent form, the student remains disengaged from what is being taught. The adolescent's existential commitment never takes hold.

The Congregation for Catholic Education (1982) proposes that "if the communication of culture is to be a genuine educational activity, it must not only be organic, but also critical and evaluative, historical and dynamic. The communication of culture in an educational context involves a methodology, whose principles and techniques are collected together into a consistent pedagogy."⁵² The teacher can provide this dynamic form within the very structure of the course by transcendently using the beautiful. Hans Urs von Balthasar, in *The Glory of the Lord*, observes that the beautiful has a power to harmonize what otherwise is disconnected:

[T]he beautiful exercises its charm, it draws forth longing. ... And the beautiful gathers everything together. ... Therefore, [it is] not simply a freewheeling harmony between parts, but a harmonization in virtue of an essential, transcendent form which gives form to all the parts (the Aristotelian moment), but which as such clarifies in itself and reveals its sublime radiance precisely as determination and the fashioning of relationship in the material.⁵³

The beautiful can transcendently attract the students to the essential content being shared by the

⁵¹ Giussani, *Risk of Education*, p. 45.

⁵² Congregation for Catholic Education [CCE], *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith*. (Rome: Vatican Press, 1982), #20-21.

⁵³ Hans Urs v. Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord, Vol. IV: The Realm of Metaphysics in Antiquity* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), p. 386.

teacher. We speak of a beautiful proof in geometry, a beautiful poem in literature, and a beautiful performance in music or gymnastics. The common element is an integral and consistent form proper to the field of study.

Another characteristic of beauty is proper **proportion**. Here consider the power of soul within the student appealed to by the teacher through what is said in the classroom. What in the student is proportional to the beauty of the subject being taught? Initially the power of soul will be the senses of hearing and sight. As Thomas says in *Summa Theologica* : “beautiful things are those which please when seen. Hence beauty consists in due proportion; for the senses delight in things duly proportioned.”⁵⁴ What power or faculty in the student apprehends this proportion? This question is key to our topic, as often both teachers and students give the incorrect answer: namely, the emotions or feelings rather than the mind or intellect.

How can a teacher help awaken in the student a proportionate response? This is particularly challenging in a secular culture which increasingly bombards the senses and imagination with video images and sounds drawing the person into intense feelings rather than into the exercise of the mind. Marshall McLuhan recognized how the overstimulation of one sense can lead to the anaesthesia of other senses and intellect.⁵⁵

Maritain urged even in the middle of the last century that “what matters most in the educational enterprise is a perpetual appeal to intelligence and free will in the young.”⁵⁶ Clearly,

⁵⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Pt. I, a. 4, art. 4, rpl., obj. 1.

⁵⁵ See Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw, 1964).

⁵⁶ Maritain, *Education at the Crossroads*, pp.9-10.

what will undermine rather than help this activity is the implosion of the senses and passions by too frequent use of videos as a substitute for the direct dialogue of the teacher and students. The continuing focus on pleasure rather than intellectual activity or moral virtue will deteriorate the student's interior formation. Young men and women need to be taught how to put aside immediate pleasures so that they can achieve long-term goals. Athletes are eager for this kind of activity. Becoming attracted to and learning how to develop the virtues of temperance and chastity can offer the high school student great potential for the gift-of-self in important ways later in life.

Again Maritain articulates the philosophical principles:

The universe of the adolescent is a transition state on the way to the universe of man. Judgment and intellectual strength are developing but are not yet really acquired. Such a mobile and anxious universe evolves under the rule of the natural impulses and tendencies of intelligence — an intelligence which is not yet matured and strengthened by those inner living energies, the sciences, arts, and wisdom, but which is sharp and fresh, eager to pass judgment on everything, and which craves intuitive sight... The mental atmosphere for adolescence should be one of truth to be embraced.⁵⁷

Maritain suggests that the teacher's role is to teach the student about the meaning of what he or she is learning. In other words, it is not enough to refrain from negative pedagogical tools such as disconnected course segments or extensive use of videos. A true teacher leads the student to discover the formal meaning of the course beyond the details of knowledge to be learned.

What I call the *meaning* of a science or art is contained in the specific truth of beauty it offers us. The objective of education is to see to it that the young grasps the truth or beauty by the natural power and gifts of his mind and the natural intuitive energy of his reason backed up by his whole sensuous, imaginative, and emotional dynamism."⁵⁸

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 61-62.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

Let us consider two practical examples of how the teacher might do this.

Discipline is always an aspect of high school teaching; it involves helping each member of the class keep the proper balance of words and actions with respect to the other members of the class, to the teacher, and to the subject at hand. It participates in the aspect of proper proportion with respect to beauty. A teacher disciplining a student by requiring intellectual work as a punishment could undermine the whole focus of seeking to awaken the mind to the beauty of truth and the discovery of knowledge. In a secular culture which does not value education for its own sake, a teacher who uses dictionary definitions, creative writing, or intellectual exercises as punishment, transcendently annuls the desire of the student to learn about new words or write about important subjects.

In this transcendental annulment the intellect is oriented towards rote behaviors in fragmented tasks that leave the student frustrated. Giussani observes a similar response from constant exposure to disconnected curricula: "This state of fragmentation reveals an emptiness, not unlike a patient whose sickness has been diagnosed only partially and therefore treated only partially."⁵⁹ Other sorts of punishments like the limitation of freedoms or privileges may be more effective here. For these kinds of discipline usually deepen the longing for the freedoms or privileges and motivate the student towards an integration of purpose and action.

Our second example occurs in the context of teaching a course on religion or morals in high school. A student is often filled with an odd combination of self-love and self-loathing as he or she passes through quick stages of physical and sexual maturing. Longing expresses itself in different actions ranging from infatuations and the forming and reforming of cliques to rejection

⁵⁹ Giussani, *Risk of Education*, p. 58.

of others perceived as unlovable. Philosophers have for centuries written about the relation of love to beauty: i.e., Socrates' ladder of love in the *Symposium* 221c-d; Marsilio Ficino's Christianization of Platonic love in the 15th century Italian Renaissance; and the personalization of love in the Lublin school of Thomistic personalism in the twentieth century.

The educator can help open the student's mind to the **third characteristic of beauty, or radiance**. The student needs to grow in self-knowledge by discovering how the radiant communication of beauty in another evokes various passions in the self. The first thing to be taught is the structure of the human person; this helps the person to know which fundamental passion interiorly in a situation of response to something or someone perceived as beautiful. Is it desire, love, hate, repulsion, anger, fear, hope, and so on? This places at the forefront an intelligent analysis of one's experience; it is to follow Lonergan's first transcendental precept to pay attention to the data.

Secondly, self-reflection is taught: How do I respond to this passion evoked by the radiation of the other person; does it move my will to illicit behavior or does it pass through my mind with the question of how I should act in relation to this passion and in relation to this particular person? This is to ask intelligent questions about the data of experience, following Lonergan's second transcendental insight 'Be intelligent'. D'Souza emphasizes the value of Maritain's insight that teachers need to know how evaluate their own experience so that they can lead their students to do the same: "The education of Catholic school teachers must include reflection upon their experience in ways that lead to the liberation and understanding of experience through the intellect and reason."⁶⁰

⁶⁰ D'Souza, "Maritain's Seven Misconceptions of Education," p. 447.

Here the work of Karol Wojtyla / John Paul II is also helpful in leading the student to intelligent insight into personal experience. How does the teenager act in relation to the deep stirring of emotions, to the experience of elation, and to the emotionalization of consciousness?⁶¹ How does a boy respond to the radiance of a beautiful body to which he is attracted by sensual love? How does a girl respond to the radiance of an attractive person in whom she seeks sentimental love and affection?⁶² What kind of values are revealed through the emotions experienced?

For example, Rev. Joseph Poggemeyer, teaching Junior Moral Theology in a Catholic high school in Ohio, discovered that by teaching the objective truth about the human person as developed in John Paul II's personalism, the student was often able to draw better conclusions about his or her own goals for love. He asked for example, "What are the three words that each describe the final goal of the human person?" His answer: "self-donating love." In addition, because he was also a coach, Fr. Poggemeyer found that student athletes, who were well disciplined in one area of sports, naturally led the others in the class in learning a disciplined moral theology as well.⁶³

Once the final goal of the human person is grasped, then the teacher can help the student practice how to get there. It concerns the proper relation of means to ends. In another example

⁶¹ Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, pp. 234-258.

⁶² Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), pp. 74-94 and 147-152.

⁶³ Joseph Poggemeyer, Course syllabi and tests for High School Religion Class. [Unpublished Raw Data]. See especially Congregation for Catholic Education [CCE], *Educational Guidance in Human Love: Outlines for Sex Education* (Rome: Vatican Press, 1983), #94.

Poggemeyer asks his junior high school students: "What three stages must be present to have a full human act"? The short answer to this question concerning the three stages is 1) counsel, 2) deliberation, and 3) act/execution. The longer answer involves teaching about proper proportion in the execution of the acts. By this question, the teacher awakens the student to the truth of the human person and to the ways in which he or she can begin to make better choices in relation to these truths. This dialogue will often involve one-on-one encouragement or correction by the teacher of dynamics within the classroom. Here, the student learns by trial and error how to choose and execute the proportionate response.

By advertent to the radiance of the higher value of what is really beautiful, the teacher evokes in the student a deep longing to be united with the truly beautiful. Through this teaching gratuitous grace may even be shared with the student, the "grace [which] is a certain beauty of soul, which wins the Divine love" as St Thomas notes in *Summa Theologica* Pt. I-II, q. 110, art. 2. The deep longing in all young men and women to love and be loved by one who is truly beautiful is often buried beneath layers of more superficial thoughts and feelings. Wojtyla describes how the transcendentals move deeply within the human person: "the evidence of experience tells us that the spiritual life of man essentially refers to, and in its strivings vibrates with, the reverberations with the experientially innermost attempts to reach truth, goodness, and beauty."⁶⁴

Maritain states two norms or rules of education that directly relate to this effort to use Christian philosophy to teach about love and beauty in a contemporary secular context:

The primary rule is to foster those fundamental dispositions which enable the

⁶⁴ Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, pp. 155-156.

principal agent to grow in the life of the mind. It is clear, in this connection, that the task of the teacher is above all one of liberation. To liberate the good energies is the best way of repressing the bad ones...

The second fundamental norm is to center attention on the inner depths of personality ... to lay stress on inwardness and the internalization of the educational influence.⁶⁵

A natural context for exercising these rules is to consider the three kinds of friendship initially identified by Aristotle, and integrated into Catholic philosophy throughout the centuries: friendships based on pleasure, on utility, and on virtue. By asking the students to reflect on whether they fulfil what Wojtyla calls the virtue of solidarity measured by 'the personalistic norm', which is never to treat another person as a means only, but always as an end in himself or herself, the mind of the student can be opened to the deeper realities and values of Christian philosophy in the midst of a secular culture which constantly promotes hedonistic or utilitarian values.⁶⁶

So far we have considered how the Christian teacher acts through words and deeds. In addition, we have described how a teacher can foster the three essential characteristics of beauty: integrity of form, proportionality, and radiance. Underneath this lies St. Thomas' original claim that the beautiful is discovered in the form which pleases the senses through its concrete presence in the world.

The final part of our reflection on teaching about the beautiful in high school will touch upon how a teacher can imitate Christ by what he or she suffers for the students. We can begin by considering Socrates' actions as recorded by Plato in *The Symposium*. Alcibiades tells us that he

⁶⁵ Maritain, *Education at the Crossroads*, p. 39.

⁶⁶ Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility*, pp. 25-44. See also CCE *Educational Guidance in Human Love*, #18-20.

unsuccessfully attempted many times to sexually seduce Socrates. In his frank description, Alcibiades, who was well known for his own physical beauty, sought to get Socrates drunk, get him alone, and in short do everything possible to encourage their love of friendship to become love of pleasure. Alcibiades continues his account: "Socrates is the only man in the world that can make me feel ashamed... But believe me ... you've only got to open him up and you'll find him so full of temperance and sobriety that you'll hardly believe your eyes. Because, you know, he doesn't really care a row of pins about good looks."⁶⁷

Not only is Socrates chaste and virtuous, but his character also brings about a change in those who love him. Alcibiades concludes: "I don't know whether anybody else has ever opened him up when he's being serious, and seen the little images inside, but I saw them once, and they looked so godlike, so golden, so beautiful, and so utterly amazing that there was nothing ... but to do exactly what he told me."⁶⁸ The irony of this is that externally Socrates was considered to be physically ugly, like a satyr, but his true beauty was the interior state of his soul, and it had the quality of so much radiance that Socrates was beautiful by being good. True beauty is identified with the good. The good person with the wrinkled face like Mother Teresa is discovered to be even more beautiful than a person who may have only external physical beauty. This is why St. Thomas says, as we noted above, that grace is a certain beauty of soul, which wins the Divine love and that participation in the Divine Goodness is grace.

Character education has become an important aspect of high school education recently in the United States. Even in public schools Catholic teachers and administrators can provide

⁶⁷ Plato, *Symposium*. In *Collected Dialogues* (Princeton: University Press, 1961), 216b-e.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 217a

opportunities for students to grow in love for transcendental 'beauty.' For example, in a public high school handbook in Grosse Ile, Michigan, character is defined as a goal: "Becoming the kind of person you want to be is a life-long journey, but it is made up of small steps. Every choice you make defines your character."⁶⁹ Subsequent pages identify thirty character traits a student could choose to work for: respectful, responsible, controlled, punctual, reliable, creative, optimistic, self-motivated, persevering, thrifty, gracious, ambitious, courageous, resourceful, joyful, kind, patient, tolerant, honest, thankful, polite, considerate, generous, cheerful, loyal, sympathetic, patriotic, trustworthy, fair, cooperative. Each trait has an explanation, several examples, and blank spaces for the student to add some personal acts which fit the trait. The beauty of a person with good character is emphasized throughout.

The Albuquerque Public Schools, drawing upon the work of the Josephson Institute of Marina del Rey, California identify Six Pillars of Character: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship.⁷⁰ The International Center for Leadership in Education, Schenectady, New York identifies a slightly different list of Twelve Guiding Principles of Exceptional Character: responsibility, compassion, perseverance, trustworthiness, respect, initiative, honest, courage, contemplation, adaptability, optimism, and loyalty.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Grosse Ile High School, *Student Handbook and Agenda 2002-2003 edition*. (Grosse Ile, Michigan: 2002). I am grateful for this information from Joe Maci, Vice-Principal of Grosse Ile Schools.

⁷⁰ L. Martinez, "Organizing a School Community Around Character Education: Albuquerque Public Schools, Albuquerque, New Mexico." In *Character-Centered Teaching Guide* (Rexford, N.Y.: International Center for Leadership in Education, Inc.: 2000), pp. 23-31.

⁷¹ M.J. Marrazo, "Character-Centered Teaching in a Comprehensive Character Education Program. In *Character-Centered Teaching Guide*, *Ibid.*, pp. 45-52.

Susan Black argues that character formation must aim to penetrate the depth of each student and of the school environment itself. She states further that the teachers themselves must model the beauty of good character as well as teach about it. Otherwise their teaching will be ineffective and counterproductive. Black identifies ways in which teachers can inadvertently undermine their efforts to help students develop a beautiful character by ignoring those characteristics in the self: "Teachers might operate on a double standard, for example, marking students down for being tardy while taking long breaks themselves... Such actions send their own message, never mind what virtues are listed on the classroom wall."⁷² This double standard with respect to the development of good character is an excellent example of a transcendental annulment of inner beauty.

The teacher must therefore witness to a unity of life: including the Thomistic characteristics of integrity of form, proper proportion, and radiance. The transcendental beauty in a human person needs to be penetrated by the transcendental One to give it inner cohesion and integration. Unity and beauty go hand in hand with the other transcendentals, goodness and truth. Otherwise, the particular characteristics striven for in character development remain more or less on the surface of a personality, brought out more for show than for depth of personal fulfillment. While we are considering each transcendental at separate levels of education in this article, the four transcendentals unite in God and draw us toward a similar integration.

The teacher, who bears witness to the transcendental truth that the most beautiful person is the one who is good, usually imitates Christ by suffering. This can occur by undergoing the

⁷² Susan Black, "The Character Conundrum," *The American School Board Journal* (December 1996): 29-31, here p. 31.

effects of evil as they are expressed by students in a classroom. Evil here needs to be understood as the lack of good, as Augustine, Boethius, and Thomas taught. Its effects can be seen in disorder among the communion of persons in the single class room. It can be expressed in the ugliness of language, in violent attitudes and actions, and so on. Teaching in high school today is extremely challenging, and some high school teachers are subjected to constant verbal assault.

In addition for the teacher to begin with a good order, based on progressive hierarchically-developed organization of a particular subject and modeling good character, he or she also has to personally absorb much that is evil and resist the temptation to retaliate. The teacher imitates Christ by suffering for one's students. Bernard Lonergan reflects that: "When everyone is dodging suffering, when no one accepts it, the burden is passed even further on."⁷³ Knowing when to suffer and when to act by strong external ordering is the particular virtue of Christian prudence that the teacher has to develop over time. Suffering the effects of evil for the good of others usually radiates a deep inner beauty common to so many saints.

In the extreme, the Christian teacher may even be called upon to offer the ultimate donation of life to fulfil his or her vocation to teach. The catalyst for this sacrifice may be a student. A recent example at Columbine High School in Colorado bears witness to this fact when a teacher lost his life protecting some students from others trying to killing them. Or the catalyst for giving one's life for one's students may come from outside the school. The Ursulines, who had a distinguished history in the education of young women in Europe and in Canada, provide an example of teachers who carried the burden of this kind of social evil:

During the French Revolution... the Jacobins retook Valenciennes where the Ursulines

⁷³ Lonergan, *Topics in Education*, p. 68.

had a school and arrested ... twelve Ursulines in September 1794.... [T]he sisters answered the tribunal, 'We returned here to teach the holy Catholic religion!' Immediately they were condemned to death, with five sent to the guillotine on October 17 and the remaining seven of October 23.⁷⁴

The beauty of these teachers, identified with the suffering Christ, radiates down the ages through their witness of martyrdom "to teach" their students.

Educating for Truth in Undergraduate University or Seminary

In the contemporary undergraduate philosophy classroom we are likely to discover many different secular attitudes towards truth. Some students influenced by classical pragmatism perceive truth as something that happens to an idea when it is repeated often enough.⁷⁵ Other students influenced by subjectivism profess that 'you have your truth and I have my truth,' and there is no way to evaluate which is better.⁷⁶ Still another group of students may think that it is impossible to be certain about any truth using a philosophical method based on reason and the observation of the senses.

How can the educator move students to Lonergan's third transcendental precept by using reason to determine whether or not a subjective insight is really true? ⁷⁷ The precept 'Be reasonable!' is a difficult challenge for Catholic philosophy of education engaged with secular culture in the classroom. The first group, the pragmatists, place the criteria for discovering truth

⁷⁴ *Magnificat* (Dunwoody, N.Y.: October 2001), Reflection on a saint for October 18.

⁷⁵ See William James, "Pragmatism's Conception of Truth," and "Humanism and Truth" in *Pragmatism and four essays from The Meaning of Truth* (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1963).

⁷⁶ See Frederick Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (New York: Penguin, 1966).

⁷⁷ Lonergan, *Method*, p. 20.

in personal feelings and experience; the second group, or subjectivists place the criteria in their will; and the third group in rejecting reason may turn to a fideism, on the one hand, or a radical skepticism, on the other hand. Yet, the Catholic educator nudges or attracts toward the nature of truth and to a renewed confidence in the human person's access to the truth. Stafford elaborates it this way:

... [T]he governing principles of Catholic education can be summarized: First, truth exists, it has been revealed by God, and men and women can discover and understand it. Second, truth is not an idea or an abstraction, but a person, Jesus Christ. Third, we encounter the truth, Jesus Christ, most fully in the Catholic Church. Fourth, we must share the truth with the world. Fifth, this sharing must proceed from a critical reflection on, and must involve a challenging dialogue with, the surrounding public culture.⁷⁸

Catholic philosophers seek this truth through the complementary path of reason. Yet, philosophy programs and courses are often a series of unrelated studies promoted uncritically by the philosophy faculty. Students then are plunged into various ways of viewing the world, truth, and good and bad or right and wrong actions without any criteria for evaluating them. Maritain reflects on how this methodology destroys the goals of education:

If the teacher himself has no general aim, nor final values to which all this process is related; if education itself is to grow "in whatever direction a novelly emerging future renders most feasible;" in other words, if the pragmatist theory requires a perpetual experimental reconstruction of the ends of the educator himself (and not only of the experience of the pupil), then it teaches educational recipes but gets away from any real art of education... the pragmatist theory can only subordinate and enslave education to the trends which may develop in collective life and society, for in the last analysis the aims newly arising in such a 'reconstruction' of ends will only be determined by the precarious factors to be controlled and the values made at each moment predominant by given social conditions or tendencies or by the state.⁷⁹

Maritain offers a gripping critique of teachers who present a horizontal series of themes

⁷⁸ Stafford, *Pastoral Letter... On Education*, I, #25.

⁷⁹ Maritain, *Education at the Crossroads*, pp. 17-18.

to a class without offering any criteria for their evaluation or without using reasonable arguments to defend one as better or worse. In this 'anarchical' methodology, the "educators mistakenly believe they are providing ... [the student] with the freedom of expansion and autonomy to which personality aspires while at the same time they deny the value of all discipline and asceticism, as well as the necessity of striving towards self-perfection. As a result, "instead of fulfilling himself, ... [the student] disperses himself and disintegrates."⁸⁰ Giussani observes how students immersed in this kind of secular education degenerate into a "skeptical emptiness that results from an education that lacks a clear hypothesis for interpreting reality."⁸¹

John Paul II also describes in *Fides et ratio* some of the 'charged' effects of secularism on the search for truth: human beings are now at the mercy of caprice, losing a capacity to contemplate truth, abandoning the investigation of being, "yielding to an undifferentiated pluralism," and losing their "way in the shifting sands of widespread scepticism." The Pope agrees with Maritain and Giussani that this effect can be so damaging at times that it undermines the very identity of the human being who seeks the truth by "reducing reason to merely accessory functions, with no real passion for the search for the truth." The student today has often lost confidence in his or her capacity to know the truth about the self, about God, and about the world. Thus, there are "attitudes of widespread distrust of the human being's great capacity for knowledge (#5)."

The tragic irony of these accusations penetrates to the heart of a conscientious teacher of undergraduate philosophy students. The teacher may believe that he or she is being charitable to

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁸¹ Giussani, *Risk of Education*, p. 56.

students within the class by letting each student determine which theory he or she prefers. However, we have stumbled again across the phenomenon of a transcendental annulment, especially when we are focusing on the transcendental of truth. The very policy which the teacher believes is respecting the truth of each approach to the philosophical topic being studied, leads to the undermining of the student's ability to find and have confidence in truth. Truth is not found in the experience of feelings; truth is not found in a capricious exercise of the will; truth is found in the conformity of the theoretical and practical intellect to reality.

The Congregation for Catholic Education recently affirmed for all teachers that "Study becomes the path for a personal encounter with the truth..."⁸² John Paul II, who taught philosophy at the University of Lublin for over twenty-two years, asks Catholic philosophers in particular:

I cannot but encourage philosophers — be they Christian or not — to trust in the power of human reason and not to set themselves goals that are too modest in their philosophizing. The lesson of history in this millennium now drawing to a close shows that this is the path to follow: it is not necessary to abandon the passion for ultimate truth, the eagerness to search for it or the audacity to forge new paths in the search.⁸³

Using the framework of this study, we ask how Catholic philosophers can teach philosophy in such a way that he or she does not transcendently annul the goal for students in the course?

First, the teacher would not retreat to what Maritain identifies as a "despotic" approach of telling the students a complete set of philosophical conclusions without awakening him or her to the actual philosophical enterprise of seeking solutions with the full exercise of mind and will. Instead, as the personalist philosopher Gabriel Marcel suggests, the teacher needs to draw the student into the concrete personal struggle with philosophical questions, helping him or her feel

⁸² CCE, *Consecrated Persons and Their Mission in Schools*, #52.

⁸³ John Paul II, *Fides et ratio* #56.

the “sting” of reality, and teaching by words and example how to be open and available to the search for truth.⁸⁴ This openness to reality is emphasized by Giussani: “To educate is to communicate one’s self, to communicate one’s way of approaching reality, for a person is a living mode of *relating to reality*.”⁸⁵ Cardinal Angelo Scola further exfoliates the meaning of this risk: “... one can understand why the experience of risk also touches the educator, who is called for this reason to ex-pose himself (i.e. to reveal himself and put himself at risk).”⁸⁶

Secondly, the teacher engages in concrete and truthful dialogue with various forms of secular thought. John Paul II gives sound examples for this engagement in his own work. He frequently uses Kant’s second formulation of the categorical imperative as the foundation for his personalistic norm; and he praises those aspects of Cartesian thought that have brought a new depth to the understanding of the human person in contemporary culture. In *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* the Pope says “I put Descartes in the forefront because he marks the beginning of a new era in the history of European thought and because this philosopher, who is certainly among the greatest that France has give the world, inaugurated the *great anthropocentric shift in philosophy*.”⁸⁷ Other contemporary Catholic philosophers both use and

⁸⁴ Gabriel Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existentialism* (New York: Farrer, 1969), chapter i, pp. 9-46 and *Creative Fidelity* (New York: Farrer, 1969), chapter iii, pp. 58-81.

⁸⁵ Giussani, *Risk of Education*, p.111.

⁸⁶ Angelo Scola, “Education and Integral Experience,” *Communio* 1 (spring 2003): 95-109, here p. 106.

⁸⁷ John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold*, p. 51.

criticize modern philosophy.⁸⁸ Here the vulnerable educator recognizes how he or she has been influenced by a secular methodology in the past that inadvertently harmed his or her students.

While promoting what is positive in modern philosophy, the teacher appropriately points to its limitations as well. John Paul II directly identifies some problems: “Descartes... split thought from existence and identified existence with reason itself: ‘Cogito, ergo sum’ (‘I think, therefore I am’)/ How different from the approach of Saint Thomas, for whom it is not *thought which determines existence, but existence, ‘esse’ which determines thought!*”⁸⁹ Etienne Gilson, while at the Medieval Institute at the University of Toronto, noted that even though Descartes helped open up Scholastic philosophy to the “great uprush of science in the seventeenth century,” he erroneously suggested that the method of one science (geometry and mathematics) was valid for everything in the real world.⁹⁰ In consequence, he turned animals into machines. Similarly, while Descartes’ emphasis on the mind as having common faculties for women and men provided a solid foundation for support of women’s rights to education and participation in the social political realm, it also provided a new foundation for a unisex model of gender identity

⁸⁸ Bernard Lonergan’s epic work *Insight* (Toronto: University Press, 1992) demonstrates the complementary relation between classical philosophy of science based on universal judgments and contemporary science based on probabilities. Charles Taylor also makes a forceful comparative claim in *A Catholic Modernity?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999): “The view I’d like to defend, if I can put it in a nutshell, is that in modern, secular culture there are mingled together both authentic developments of the gospel, of an incarnational mode of life, and also a closing off to God that negates the gospel”, p. 16.

⁸⁹ John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold*, p. 38.

⁹⁰ Etienne Gilson, “The Distinctiveness of the Philosophic Order.” In *A Gilson Reader* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1957): 484-64, here 49.

which proves unsatisfactory for fundamental principles of philosophical anthropology.⁹¹

The Catholic inspiration shifts imbalances of either unisex theories or polarity theories towards an integral complementarity.⁹² In the classroom a Catholic movement towards authentic complementarity can be fostered by a teacher who accepts different perspectives on truth along with a definitive witness to objective truth. As Scola puts it: "The educator is thus a witness because he **cannot not** expose himself in the first person in order to respond to the call of truth."⁹³ Students differentiated by sex and gender identity and experience may bring different perspectives to bear on a common question as may students differentiated by race, class, and culture. Yet, to 'Be Reasonable,' Lonergan's third transcendental precept, is to persist beyond one's subjective insight to find the grounds in reality for affirming what is objectively true.

The teacher holds the tension of the personal ground of relation between objective truth and reality among all those different perspectives of those in the classroom. Scola summarizes this mission of the Catholic educator as follows:

With Jesus Christ and with Christianity, the principle of *difference in unity* that lives in the mystery of the Trinity passes over, by virtue of the Incarnation, into history and becomes, according to the law of analogy, a principle for understanding and appreciating every difference. Difference is not only tolerated but exalted, because it is kept in unity by the Truth that reaches down to the *ultima thule* of human experience and so prevents even the most radical difference from degenerating into a more or less violent seed of dissolution./ This brings out the full positivity of the role the other plays in the

⁹¹ Prudence Allen, "Descartes, The Concept of Woman and the French Revolution." In Y. Hudson and C. Peden, eds, *Revolution, violence, and equality: Studies in Social and political theory*, 10, 3 (Lewiston/Queenstown/Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990): 61-78.

⁹² Sr. Prudence Allen, RSM and Sr. Moira Debono, Bishop Vital Grandin Lecture Series, Newman Theological College, Edmonton, Alberta, November 7-8, 2003. Recorded by Upper Room, Box 5146 Drayton Valley, Alberta, T7A 1R3.

⁹³ Scola, "Education and Integral Experience," p. 107. My emphasis.

experience of the I.⁹⁴

After engaging the student in the dynamism of the philosophical activity itself and entering into dialogue with the secular aspects of the culture, it is helpful to assure students that even though truth is objective, there is still no one single Catholic philosophy that captures all the truth perfectly. John Paul II states in *Fides et ratio* (#49):

The Church has no philosophy of her own nor does she canonize any one particular philosophy in preference to others. The underlying reason for this reluctance is that ... philosophy must remain faithful to its own principles and methods. Otherwise there would be no guarantee that it would remain oriented to truth and that it was moving toward truth by way of a process governed by reason. A philosophy which did not proceed in the light of reason according to its own principles and methods would serve little purpose. At the deepest level, the autonomy which philosophy enjoys is rooted in the fact that reason is by its nature oriented to truth and is equipped moreover with the means necessary to arrive at truth.

Even with the autonomy of philosophy, it is still possible to evaluate whether a particular philosopher is closer than another to the truth. Criteria for making this evaluation include testing:

1) the correlation between the philosophy and the truth revealed through faith, and 2) the correlation between the philosophy and the implicit thought of common sense. Thus, any philosophical system which is completely contrary to either revealed faith or the implicit common philosophy of peoples is more likely to contain error than one that does not.⁹⁵

Over the years, some philosophers have met these criteria better than others. *Fides et ratio* clearly honors Thomas Aquinas as holding first place. Others include Augustine, Anselm, Pascal, Edith Stein, John Henry Newman, Etienne Gilson, and Antonio Rosmini. Meeting criteria for good Catholic philosophy does not protect from making error. The autonomy of reason

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

⁹⁵ See Ralph McInerny, "Implicit Philosophy," *Tópicos* 19 (2000): 153-165.

protects a proper pathway to the truth, because it is the urge towards truth in all philosophers that keeps the field self-correcting over time.

John Paul II makes the interesting claim that “one may define the human being, therefore, as *the one who seeks the truth*.”⁹⁶ The Congregation for Catholic Education emphasizes this as a particularly Christian teaching: “The school considers human knowledge as a truth to be discovered. In the measure in which subjects are taught by someone who knowingly and without restraint seeks the truth, they are to that extent Christian. Discovery and awareness of truth leads man to the discovery of Truth itself.”⁹⁷ The person searching for truth is met by Jesus Christ, the Way and the Truth. The encounter with the Truth revealed through Jesus Christ in the pathway of faith stirs thought in the person. Thus, Christian revelation synergizes both philosophy and theology in the human being defined as the one who seeks the truth. As Hans Urs von Balthasar summarizes: Christian philosophy works through “the art of breaking open all finite, philosophical truth in the direction of Christ, and the art of the clarifying transposition.”⁹⁸

Truth is a collective activity, because we both entrust ourselves to others in what we believe is true; we seek to have our thoughts corrected by others so that they adhere more closely to the truth. W. Norris Clarke, in his commentary on *Fides et ratio* elaborates: “to develop properly, philosophy needs a *community of persons*, and *especially* the experience of *trust between persons*, since so much of what we know and take as data for understanding must come

⁹⁶ John Paul II, *Fides et ratio*, #28.

⁹⁷ CCE, *The Catholic School*, # 41-42.

⁹⁸ Hans Urs von Balthasar, “On the tasks of Catholic philosophy in our time,” *Communio* 20 (spring, 1993): 148-187, here p.156.

from trust in what others tell us.”⁹⁹ The communal search for truth is the foundation for interdisciplinary studies which is most effective when each person is well founded in a particular methodology and a particular field. Each offers to the other expertise in a specified context of study about a common area of interest. These mutual gifts of knowledge and methodology offer the possibility of overcoming various forms of bias.¹⁰⁰ Pope John Paul II considers the components of interdisciplinary studies: “While each discipline is taught systematically and according to its own methods, interdisciplinary studies, assisted by a careful and thorough study of philosophy and theology, enable students to acquire an organic vision of reality and to develop a continuing desire for intellectual progress.”¹⁰¹

Another criteria for evaluating the truth of a particular philosophy is whether the philosopher is open to the deeper dimensions of metaphysics. John Paul II describes its relation to the transcendentals in *Fides et ratio* #83:

Wherever men and women discover a call to the absolute and transcendent, the metaphysical dimension of reality opens up before them: in truth, in beauty, in moral values, in other persons, in being itself, in God... We face a great challenge at the end of this millennium to move from *phenomenon to foundation*, a step as necessary as it is urgent. Therefore, a philosophy which shuns metaphysics would be radically unsuited to the task of mediation.

The Catholic philosopher, as an educating mediator in the classroom among faith, autonomous philosophy, and secular culture, and the deep longings for truth in each student opens to this enduring and real metaphysical dimension.

⁹⁹ Norris Clarke, S.J., “Complementarity,” pp. 562-563.

¹⁰⁰ For a discussion of different kinds of bias see Lonergan, *Insight*, chapter 7.

¹⁰¹ John Paul II, *Ex corde Ecclesiae* (On Catholic Universities), (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1990), #20.

Educating about the Good in Graduate Studies

In Catholic philosophy, “the good is the end of a being, since it makes the being perfect. And so the good is always the perfection of a being.”¹⁰² In the case of the human person, the actualization of this good requires interpersonal relations in the family, educational contexts, and broader society. Catholic philosophy has often described this broader human good as the “common good.” Jacques Maritain, drawing from Thomas Aquinas, articulated its fundamental dynamics in the 1940's in *The Person and the Common Good*; *Gaudium et spes* #26 applied its foundations to the relation of the Church and the modern world in the 1960's; and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* #1905-1912 and 1924-1927 summarized its crucial importance for virtuous Life in Christ of all Christians in the 1990's. It remains for educators in the new millennium to engage the common good with secular culture in the classroom.

Why should the transcendental good effectively engage with secular culture in higher education and by analogy with lower forms of education? In the contemporary world where the reality of objective good is widely rejected, the Congregation for Catholic Education urgency requests a new evangelization of education:

On the threshold of the Third millennium education faces new challenges which are the result of a new socio-political and cultural context. First and foremost, we have a crisis of values which, in highly developed societies in particular, assumes the form, often exalted by the media, of subjectivism, moral relativism and nihilism. The extreme pluralism pervading contemporary society leads to behaviour patterns which are at times so opposed to one another as to undermine any idea of community identity.¹⁰³

Calling for a “courageous renewal” and identifying a “fundamental duty to evangelize,” Catholic

¹⁰² Karol Wojtyla, “In Search of the Basis of Perfectionism in Ethics,” *Person and Community*, 48.

¹⁰³ CCE, *The Catholic School*, #1.

teachers are challenged to consider “prudent innovations” in their schools and classrooms.¹⁰⁴

Teachers foster in their classroom the fourth transcendental, good, by gathering together all the principles elaborated in the first three transcendentals: unity, beauty, and truth. The first three transcendental precepts of Lonergan (be attentive to the data, ask intelligent questions to gain subjective insight, and test your subjective insight to determine whether or not it is true) open to a fourth transcendental precept: ‘Be Responsible!’ The Catholic educator is challenged to act responsibly for the common good on the true good discovered and affirmed.

What is the common good? *Gaudium et spes* offers this definition: “the common good, which is the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily.”¹⁰⁵ The same document integrates education into its consideration of the common good because it is a way “to safeguard the notion of the human person as a totality in which predominate values of intellect, will, conscience, and brotherhood, since these values were established by the creator and wondrously restored and elevated by Christ(#61).”

Catholic Universities hold a unique place in promoting the common good. One sample mission statement makes this clear: “The Catholic University of America sees itself as faithful to the challenge proposed by the Second Vatican Council for institutions of higher learning, namely, to put forth every effort so that “the Christian mind may achieve... a public, persistent, and universal presence in the whole enterprise of advancing higher culture (*Gravissimum*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, #2.

¹⁰⁵ *Gaudium et spes*, #26. This definition is repeated in *Catechism of the Catholic Church* #1905.

educationis, n. 10).”¹⁰⁶

In addition to promoting the dignity of the individual person through education, working for the common good also involves “in the name of the common good ... to make accessible to each what is needed to lead a truly human life: food, clothing, health, work ... and so on.”¹⁰⁷ St. Francis Xavier University’s Mission Statement states its connection to the Antigonish Movement, which “originated as a response to the poverty afflicting farmers, fishers, miners and other disadvantaged groups in Eastern Canada.... [and] used a practical and successful strategy of adult education and group action.”¹⁰⁸ The educational base of this cooperative movement has expanded until people now come to Nova Scotia from around the world to study and apply its Catholic social principles.

How can Catholic Universities be sure that they are not inadvertently transcendently annulling their stated mission to educate towards building the common good? This question is particularly urgent today when secular culture seems dominate both structure and content of all higher education (including Catholic institutions). Tracey Rowland, in *Culture and the Thomist Tradition After Vatican II*, argues that ambiguity in *Gaudium et spes* about the relation of Catholic values to secular culture has created a crisis of effectiveness for Catholic faith engaging

¹⁰⁶ Catholic University of America. *Graduate Studies 2001-2002 Announcements*. (Washington DC: CUA Press, 2001)

¹⁰⁷ *Catechism* #1908. See also, *Gaudium et spes* #26.

¹⁰⁸ The Antigonish Movement (2002). Retrieved July 2002, from www.stfx.ca/institutes/coady/text_about_antigonishmovement.html.

with secular culture which appears to be hostile to it.¹⁰⁹

Gaudium et spes provides the common good as the measure by which to evaluate any culture in #59 as noted in bold:

Culture, since it flows from man's rational and social nature, has continual need of rightful freedom of development and a legitimate possibility of autonomy according to its own principles. Quite rightly it demands respect and enjoys a certain inviolability, provided, of course, that the rights of the individual and the community, both particular and universal, are safeguarded within the limits of the common good.

The common good has two measures that must be present simultaneously: the good of self and the good of the community including that of each and every other person in the community.

These serve as measures of any culture.¹¹⁰ Thus, a Catholic educator must determine how 'the rights of the individual and the community, both particular and universal, are safeguarded within the limits of the common good' in the context of his or her classroom when it is pervaded by the values of secularism.

The Congregation for Catholic Education urges educators to confront the autonomy of secular culture in the classroom by consistently fostering the development of each student and of the whole class. "Today especially one sees a world which clamors for solidarity and yet experiences the rise of new forms of individualism. Society can note from the Catholic school that it is possible to create true communities out of a common effort for the common good."¹¹¹

Yet what methodology can a teacher use to accomplish such a daunting task? How can

¹⁰⁹ Tracey Rowland, *Culture and the Thomist Tradition After Vatican II* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), chapter 1.

¹¹⁰ E.g., Francis E. George, OMI, *Inculturation and Ecclesial Communion: Culture and Church in the Teaching of Pope John Paul II* (Rome: Urbaniana University Press, 1990).

¹¹¹ CCE, *The Catholic School*, #62.

he or she foster the capacity within each student to give of self to other members of the class?

Gaudium et spes encapsulates the meaning of solidarity in the Church as a communion “in which everyone as members one of the other would render mutual service in the measure of the different gifts bestowed on each”(§32). This kind of community is attractive to students of all ages and backgrounds. It fills a genuine desire for friendship. Yet in the teacher, it must have even deeper spiritual roots.

The Congregation for Catholic Education connects teaching about Christian communion with the mystery of the Holy Trinity:

It is first and foremost necessary to promote a *spirituality of communion* capable of becoming the educational principle in the various environments in which the human person is formed. This *spirituality* is learned by making our hearts ponder on the mystery of the Trinity, whose light is reflected in the face of every person, and welcomed and appreciated as a gift.¹¹²

Consecrated persons teaching with laity and priests in Catholic schools can build the common good by their mutual relations and “reveal that participation in the Trinitarian communion can change human relations creating a new kind of solidarity.”¹¹³ This spirituality of communion can permeate a Catholic Institution so that “[t]he educating community, taken as a whole, is thus called to further the objective of a school as a place of complete formation through interpersonal relations.”¹¹⁴

A philosophical foundation for the same principle is provided by Karol Wojtyla’s description of how solidarity works in the academic setting of a single course:

¹¹² CCE, *Consecrated Persons and Their Mission in Schools*, #15. My emphasis.

¹¹³ CCE, *Ibid.*, #16.

¹¹⁴ CCE, *The Catholic School*, #18.

The attitude of solidarity... is the attitude of a community, in which the common good properly conditions and initiates participation, and participation in turn properly serves the common good, fosters it, and furthers its realization. 'Solidarity,' means a constant readiness to accept and to realize one's share in the community because of one's membership within that particular community... [the student] does what he is supposed to do not only because of his membership in the group, but because he has the 'benefit of the whole' in view: he does it for the 'common good.' The awareness of the common good makes him look beyond his own share; and this intentional reference allows him to realize essentially his own share.¹¹⁵

Catholic educators have a great opportunity to work towards fostering the common good through teaching by word and example how to practice the virtue of solidarity.

Teachers may also transcendently annul the possibility of communion. The Congregation for Catholic Education's warns that "an unprepared teacher can do a great deal of harm."¹¹⁶ While lack of preparation may occur on the level of the material taught, it can also occur in the methodology and dynamics in the classroom itself. In a graduate seminar of a small number of students, does the teacher know how to observe each student with an eye to encouraging a greater participation in building the common good? Has the virtue of solidarity become so integrated into his or her way of teaching that simple corrections or encouragements can occur in the actual dynamics of the class itself? A teacher who communicates an attitude of disinterestedness, noninvolvement, or unavailability to students transcendently annuls building the common good in that particular class.

¹¹⁵ Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, p. 285. I should note here that in Montreal I was able to use this principle to develop relations oriented towards building the common good in a small graduate seminar which had Muslim, Jewish, Christian, and agnostic students studying together. All were attracted to learning how solidarity worked in the class. They seemed to long to apply this methodology because it was based on a fundamental truth about the human person and relation.

¹¹⁶ CCE, *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, #97.

Whenever individual or group, particular or universal, loses its balance in a community, then the common good is annulled. Jacques Maritain saw the destructive effects of a teacher who dominates students as analogous to a tyrannical government over a nation.¹¹⁷ Students too can annul attempts to build the common good unless formed away from destructive values of a particular culture. The challenge of educating students who come from violent backgrounds is poignantly described by the Congregation for Catholic Education:

Many young people find themselves in a condition of radical instability ... they live in a one dimensional universe in which the only criterion is practical utility and the only value is economic and technological progress ... Others live in an environment devoid of truly human relationships; as a result, they suffer from loneliness and a lack of affection... [I]t is found in oppressive regimes, among the homeless, and in the cold and impersonal dwelling of the rich... [They] have been influenced by a world in which human values are in chaos because these values are no longer rooted in God... Their worry and insecurity become an almost irresistible urge to focus in on themselves, and this can lead to violence when young people are together — a violence that is not always limited to words.¹¹⁸

How can a Catholic teacher help students to move away either from an exclusive focus on the self or on an ideology which may neglect the dignity of all persons in a classroom?

Gabriel Marcel emphasizes the value of availability through which one person freely gives the self to another.¹¹⁹ Giussani argues in the *Risk of Education* that when an educator conveys an attitude of availability to the students in the class, a real interpersonal exchange can occur beyond the transmission of the particular subject matter being taught. In this way, a

¹¹⁷ Jacques Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985) chapter 3; and *Education at the Crossroads*, chapter 2.

¹¹⁸ CCE, *Religious Dimension of Education*, #10-12.

¹¹⁹ Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator: Introduction to a Metaphysic of Hope* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1962), "The Ego and its relation to Others," pp. 13-28 and *Creative Fidelity*, "Belonging and disposability," chapter 2.

transcendental annulment is avoided by an experience of real transcendental goodness radiating from the educator and attractive to the student. A student may many decades later remember a teacher's presence in a class while particular details of the subject being taught has long been forgotten. A similar reality may be experienced among the students who shared a particular class. They remember being in the available presence of one another without recalling the particular details of dialogues.

Availability by itself, however, is not enough to achieve the goal. If a teacher allows students to voice any sort of opinion about particular values as a way to respect differences among students in a relativistic culture, without criteria for evaluating true goods, then we encounter a different form of transcendental annulment. Francis Slade captures this regrettable teaching methodology:

Philosophy is endless talk about questions that cannot be resolved. The mind encounters itself as a multitude of voices. [According to Msgr. Robert Sokolowski] 'Confusions within the philosophical enterprise create alternative voices, I's that are set in opposition, voices that can only at best quote one another's speeches while being unable to state them as their own.'"¹²⁰

Plato recognized several centuries before Jesus Christ in *Laws* 653c that education should teach a person how to "abhor what he should abhor and relish what he should relish." The Congregation for Catholic Education affirms this same principle two thousand years later:

It is one of the formal tasks of ... education to draw out the ethical dimension for the precise purpose of arousing the individual's inner spiritual dynamism and to aid his achieving that moral freedom which complements the psychological. Behind this moral

¹²⁰ F. Slade, "Was Ist Aufklärung? Notes on Maritain, Rorty, and Bloom With Thanks But No Apologies to Immanuel Kant, reflecting on Robert Sokolowski, *Moral Action: A Phenomenological Study* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1985). In Daniel McInerney, ed. *The Common Things: Essays on Thomism and Education* (Mishawaka, Indiana: American Maritain Association, pp. 48-68, here p. 66.

freedom, however, stand those absolute values which alone give meaning and value to human life.”¹²¹

In a graduate seminar a teacher can interrelate the four transcendentals by fostering the integrative unity within a particular student, through a union of teacher and students in building the common good, and by the shared experience of a ‘good course’ when those involved are authentically participating in this interpersonal reality.

One methodology I have found particularly effective for building interpersonal relations both in a graduate course at a large Canadian university and in an undergraduate course in a seminary in the United States is to use Wojtyla’s *The Acting Person* as a laboratory for the students to practice building up the common good as they are studying about its personalistic dynamics.¹²² Most graduate school classes are small and can be taught on a seminar model. Interaction among students and between students and professor can directly participate in building the common good by fostering the virtue of solidarity. In this seminar, each student presents a 15 minute summary of a preassigned section of the text, all other students then take 5 minutes to write down a response to this presentation; a 20 minute discussion follows based on the written responses and led by the student presenter. The professor intercedes to correct error or amplify arguments. At the end of the class, the responses are collected, photocopied with one copy given back to the presenter for integration into the written summary of the presentation and the other copy given to the professor for comment and return to the student. This dynamic

¹²¹ CCE, *The Catholic School*, #30.

¹²² See Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, chapter seven. This provides one counter-response to James Swindal’s important lament that “courses in philosophical anthropology ... have all but disappeared in Catholic Universities.” in “Pragmatism and a ‘Catholic’ Philosophical Anthropology,” p. 73.

continues throughout the entire semester so that each student has the benefit of these multiple responses; and the professor has the opportunity to gently nudge each student towards an increasingly authentic manner of participation in building the common good of the academic seminar.

In *The Acting Person*, Karol Wojtyla mentions the academic seminar as a community of acting: "A ... group of students attending a lecture ... [is a] communit[y] of acting; each ... student is a member of a definite community of acting."¹²³ The community of students can be considered from the perspective of the **objective** aim which is "to learn about the problems that are the theme of the lecture, which in turn forms part of a course of studies and thus of the students' curriculum."¹²⁴

The seminar class can also be considered from its **subjective** aim. Here each student chooses his manner of participation in the intersubjective community of the class itself. Wojtyla concludes that the actual fulfillment of the individual student is directly related to his free decisions and acts in relation to this subjective aim. Will the student engage with others in the class, or does he or she simply conform and use others? Wojtyla argues that "[i]t is impossible to define the common good without simultaneously taking into account the subjective moment, that is, the moment of acting in relation to the acting persons."¹²⁵

Wojtyla describes how students and teacher can authentically build the common good through active solidarity. The student who participates in a class with subjective and objective

¹²³ Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, p. 279.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 281.

aims to build the common good, learns how to engage in dialogue, to be willing to oppose others with respect but with courage, to prepare to contribute to the seminar, and to avoid simple conformism or an attitude of non-involvement or utility. In so doing he or she both builds up the common good of the class and becomes personally fulfilled in the study of the particular subject.

A key to this process of educating for the common good within a model of philosophical anthropology is to teach about conscience. Wojtyla's *Acting Person* contains several sections on conscience, and he states unequivocally that its proper exercise is essential for the fulfillment of the human person. His position is consistent with the Lublin School of Existential Personalism as articulated by M.A. Krapiec, past Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy and Rector of the Catholic University of Lublin:

Realization of common good is the only foundation for the coming into being of a community and for authority that coordinates the genuine rights of individual persons. A society thus understood is a society of persons, and hence of rational free persons, who realize common good through acts of love, or persons who are subjects of laws, of beings 'for themselves' and, through real acts of knowledge, love and creativity are also beings 'for another.' ... Community, thus understood, is therefore an accepted form of government above all 'from within', through the consciences of free persons.¹²⁶

How can a teacher educate his or her students about conscience? The Congregation for Catholic Education says that: "[a] teacher can invite the students to examine their own consciences."¹²⁷ A professor at the university level can also teach about conscience in a general way at the same time as her or she invites students to consult their conscience with respect to the quality of intersubjective participation in a particular class or seminar.

¹²⁶ M.A. Krapiec, *I- Man*, p. 265.

¹²⁷ CCE, *Religious Dimension of Education*, #92.

One of the first things that must be taught is that secular culture consistently misleads persons about the true location of conscience in the self. Nietzsche and Hegel imply that the conscience is found primarily in the exercise of **will**, James suggests that it is found when the **imagination** projects the consequences of a future act, Freud argues that it is derived from **memory**, Hume and many contemporary secular feminists argue conscience resides in the **feelings or emotions**, while Kant and manualists argue that it is found in universal laws found in the **theoretical reason**.¹²⁸

The second thing that must be taught is that conscience is located in a nexus between the two transcendentals, good and true and at the heart of the unity of the human person. Karol Wojtyla states it this way: "Conscience, as a key element of the self-fulfillment of the personal self, points in a special way to transcendence and, so to speak, lies at its subjective center. Objectively, transcendence is realized in a relation to the truth and to the good as 'true'"¹²⁹ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* #1778 neatly summarizes: "Conscience is a judgment of reason whereby the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act that he is going to perform, is in the process of performing, or has already completed." An important task of the engagement of Catholic philosophers with secular culture is to teach the students how to find their conscience and encourage its proper exercise

A third thing that can be taught is how to consult one's conscience in the generally 'non-threatening' context of an academic course. In a secular culture, a Catholic teacher can help a

¹²⁸ For a detailed study of these different theories of conscience see Sr. P. Allen, RSM, "Where is Our Conscience? Aquinas and Modern and Contemporary Philosophers," forthcoming in *International Philosophical Quarterly*, September 2004.

¹²⁹ Karol Wojtyla, *Person and Community* (Peter Lang: New York: 1993), p. 249.

student form his or her conscience so that it more closely conforms to objective truth with respect to the goal of build the common good by ways he or she directs dialogue in the class. Let me be more specific. Many students may act impulsively in a classroom, interjecting questions or observations constantly, raising questions without forethought, arguing with either the teacher or another student without considering a proper way to enter into opposition, or talking to a neighbor about a topic not related to the subject at hand. Other students may simply sit passively, conforming to what the teacher asks, fearing to risk making a comment or raising a question, and not engaging in the dynamics of the class. These are all examples of what Wojtyla describes as inauthentic and non- participative attitudes in community.¹³⁰

In *The Splendor of Truth*, John Paul II clarifies that: “in the practical judgment of conscience, which imposes on the person the obligation to perform a given act, the link between freedom and truth is made manifest. Precisely for this reason, conscience expresses itself in acts of ‘judgment’ which reflect the truth about the good, and not in arbitrary ‘decisions.’”¹³¹ By each response to an intervention a teacher can direct the student to reflect on whether the judgment truly passed through his or her conscience before being expressed. What were the effects of the choice? Did the student feel more or less fulfilled by his or her act? Only the student can determine the result of this self examination. A Catholic teacher has an obligation to build interpersonal relations where we teach:

Teaching has an extraordinary moral depth and is one of man’s most excellent and creative activities, for the teacher does not write on inanimate material, but on the very

¹³⁰ See Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, pp. 293-395.

¹³¹ John Paul II, *The Splendour of Truth* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), #61.

spirits of human beings. The personal relations between the teacher and the students, therefore, assume an enormous importance and are not limited simply to giving and taking.¹³²

The classroom provides a safe and consistent environment within which to begin this practical exercise.

If the Catholic teacher and students bring to consciousness during a semester the habitual consultation of one's conscience before speaking, or refraining from speaking, with a private review after each class, it is likely that many within a seminar will begin to develop a new skill in building the common good. In this way the Catholic teacher can:

give pride of place in the education [he or she] provides through Christian Doctrine to the gradual formation of conscience in fundamental, permanent virtues — above all the theological virtues, and charity in particular, which is, so to speak, the life-giving spirit which transforms a man of virtue into a man of Christ. Christ, therefore, is the teaching-centre, the Model on Whom the Christian shapes his life.¹³³

Building the common good in a graduate course can then be applied analogically in subsequent groups or communities of action in one's professional and personal life. As John Paul II observes: "There is a close correlation between the progress made by students doing higher studies and the well being of society and of the church itself."¹³⁴

Conclusion

In this discussion of the four transcendentals we have considered how the teacher can either inhibit or release the self actualization of a young child in elementary school towards a

¹³² CCE, *Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, #19.

¹³³ CCE, *The Catholic School*, #47.

¹³⁴ John Paul II, *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, #10.

unity of personality and within a unified classroom. Then we considered how a teacher can either inhibit or awaken a love for what is truly beautiful in highschool students. In reflecting on undergraduate education we discussed ways in which a teacher can awaken or impede a student's intellect from longing to discover Truth in complement relations with other persons. Finally, we considered how a teacher can either ignore or foster in graduate education the will to make good choices for the common good based on conscience and true goods. These four transcendentals, while separated hierarchically for purposes of discussion among four levels of education, actually operate all together at each level of education.

The following chart summarizes the main structure of the argument in this paper:

Transcendental attributes of God found in everything that exists	Transcendental Goals in the Classroom	Transcendental Annulments by Educators	Transcendental methodologies to foster the New Evangelization of education
	How the transcendentals of God are lived out by persons and communities.	How teachers inadvertently undermine their goals by destroying the conditions necessary for their achievement.	Hierarchical Precepts for educating at every level. Be attentive Be intelligent Be reasonable Be responsible
One	Educate for unity within the individual student and for unity among the students	Systematic offering of material rewards to individual students for spiritual acts	Foster spiritual values in building virtue. Offer experiences of communal eating and reading as preparation for liturgy.

Beautiful	Educate about the beautiful destiny of the human person; the goal of human life.	Neglect the integral form; proportion, or radiance of a course. Use intellectual work as punishment	Educate about the human person and love of true beauty . Use punishments that awaken longing for good use of freedom. Offer consistent witness including suffering evil for the good of the students.
True	Educate about the objective foundation of truth and reality.	Provide courses or unconnected fragments without integration. Teach with an attitude of secular subjectivism.	Engage principles of Catholic philosophy directly with secular culture. Build authentic complementarity based on communal dialogue about reality.
Good	Educate about the common good and the virtue of solidarity.	Neglect the common good in the classroom by not being available to the students, by allowing the group to dominate an individual, or by allowing an individual (including the teacher) to dominate the class. Allow erroneous secular views about conscience to pervade classroom dynamics.	Teach how to build the common good by word and example. Demonstrate authentic ways of intersubjective participation in seminars. Challenge examples in self and others of inauthentic participation. Teach students how to find and exercise their conscience in relation to their participation in class or seminar.

In so far as a teacher participates in educating by what is said, done, suffered, and witnessed for Unity, the Beautiful, the True, and the Good, he or she participates in the Divine

qualities of the One, Beautiful, True, and Good God. In so far as the teacher leads students into a deeper appreciation for one or more of these transcendentals the teacher is accomplishing more than simply communicating knowledge about a subject matter.

In effect, the Catholic educator helps a student form his or her own personality towards the unified goal of perfect and full union with God and the communion of saints. This journey is truly a Christian journey in which the teacher helps form individual human natures which, when transformed by grace and freedom rooted in the true good, become capable of the greatest service and the greatest happiness. *Gaudium et spes* (#76) guides this journey by integrating the four transcendentals when it states: “the Church, whose duty it is to foster and elevate all that is true, all that is good, and all that is beautiful in the human community, consolidates peace among men for the glory of God.”